

# THE·CAUSES·OF·THE EUROPEAN·CONFLICT

BY · JOHN · W · BURGESS · EMERITUS  
PROFESSOR · OF · CONSTITUTIONAL  
LAW · AND · FORMERLY · DEAN · OF  
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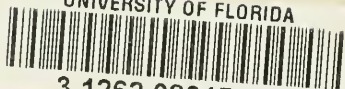


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## FOREWORD

The Germanistic Society plans to issue a series of pamphlets to appear from time to time, dealing with the war in Europe and its underlying causes. The Society has solicited contributions from various writers and historians. The pamphlets are to serve the cause of truth, to correct misrepresentations, and to exemplify the spirit of objectivity and fair play.

**The present issue is a reprint of a letter which originally appeared in the Boston Evening Transcript of Wednesday, August the nineteenth, 1914.**

Copies of these pamphlets are for sale at the office of the Society at the following prices:

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THE GERMANISTIC SOCIETY  
OF CHICAGO . . . . .  
LOUIS GUENZEL, Recording Secretary  
332 So. Michigan Ave., Chicago, Ill.

# The Causes of the European Conflict

By

Prof. JOHN W. BURGESS,

Ph. D., Ju. D., L. L. D.

This is no time and no subject when, or upon which, one should speak lightly, ignorantly, or with prejudice. It is one of the world's most serious moments and the views and sympathies now formed will determine the course of the world's development for many years to come. Heavy indeed is the responsibility which he incurs who would assume the role of teacher at this juncture and it is his first duty to present the credentials which warrant his temerity.

First of all, I am an Anglo-American of the earliest stock and the most pronounced type. I have existed here, potentially or actually, since the year 1638 and my European cousins of to-day are squires and curates in Dorsetshire. Moreover, I admire and revere England, not only because of what she has done for liberty and self-government at home, but because she has borne the white man's burden throughout the world and borne it true and well.

On the other hand, what I possess of higher learning has been won in Germany. I have studied in her famous universi-

ties and bear their degrees and in three of them have occupied the teacher's chair. I have lived 10 years of my life among her people and enjoy a circle of valued friendships which extends from Königsberg to Strassburg, from Hamburg to Munich and from Osnabrück to Berchtesgaden, and which reaches through all classes of society from the occupant of the throne to the dweller in the humble cottage. I have known four generations of Hohenzollerns and, of the three generations now extant, have been brought into rather close contact with the members of two of them. While, as to the men of science and letters and politics who have made the Germany of the last half-century, I have known them nearly all and have sat, as student, at the feet of many of them. I must concede that of English descent though I am, still I feel somewhat less at home in the motherland than in the fatherland. Nevertheless, I am conscious of the impulse to treat each with fairness in any account I may attempt to give of their motives, purposes and actions.

### THE MISSION OF THE GERMAN EMPIRE.

It was in the year 1871, in the midst of the Franco-Prussian war, that I first trod the soil of Germany and it was from and with those who fought that war on the German side that I first learned the politics and diplomacy of Europe. Almost from the first day that I took my seat in the lecture room of the university, I imbibed the doctrine that the great national, international and world-purpose of the newly-created German empire was to protect and defend the Teutonic civilization of continental Europe against the oriental Slavic quasi-civilization on the one side, and the decaying Latin civilization on the other.

After a little I began to hear of the "pan-Slavic policy" of Russia and the "revanche policy" of France. For a while the latter, the policy of France for retaking Alsace-Lorraine, occupied the chief attention. But in 1876, with the Russian attack upon the

Turks, the pan-Slavic policy of Russia, the policy of uniting the Slavs in the German empire, the Austro-Hungarian empire and in the Turkish empire with, and under the sway of, Russia was moved into the foreground. All western Europe recognized the peril to modern civilization and the powers of Europe assembled at Berlin in 1878 to meet and master it.

The astute British premier, Lord Beaconsfield, supported by the blunt and masterful Bismarck, directed the work of the congress, and the pan-Slavic policy of Russia was given a severe setback. Russia was allowed to take a little almost worthless territory in Europe and territory of greater value in Asia; Roumania, Servia and Montenegro were made independent states; Bulgaria was given an autonomous administration with a European Christian prince, but under the nominal suzerainty of the Turkish sultan; and the Turkish provinces of Bosnia and Herzegovina, then almost free zones infested by bandits, were placed under Austro-Hungarian administration, also subject to the nominal suzerainty of the sultan.

With this the much suspected and dreaded activities of Russia were directed toward Asia, and Russia was now for more than 20 years, from 1880 to 1902, occupied chiefly with the extension of her empire in the Orient. The German empire and the Austro-Hungarian empire were delivered for the moment from this great peril and enabled to pursue the line of peaceable development and progress. The greater security to the eastern borders of these great states, thus established, also helped to reduce the force of the French spirit of revenge, as the prospect of its satisfaction became more distant.

It was during this period, however, that Germany developed from an agricultural to a manufacturing and commercial community, that is, became a competitor of Great Britain and France, especially of Great Britain, in world industry. Her marvelous growth in this direction excited soon the jealousy, the envy and



then the hostility of Great Britain. We in the United States, however, reaped great advantage from the industrial and commercial competition between the two great powers and we were amused at the pettishness of Great Britain in representing it as something unfair and illegitimate. We little suspected to what direful results it would lead.

## THE POLICY OF KING EDWARD VII.

When Edward VII came to the throne, in the year 1901, he saw Great Britain's interests in the Orient threatened by Russia's policy of extension in Asia and her commercial interests throughout the world threatened by the active and intelligent competition of the Germans. He, as all rulers at the moment of accession, felt the ambition to do something to relieve the disadvantages, to say the least, under which in these respects his country was laboring. He began that course of diplomacy for which he won the title of peace lover. The first element of it was the approach to Japan and encouragement to Japan to resist the advance of Russia. This movement culminated in the war between Russia and Japan of the years 1904-1905, in which Russia was worsted and checked in the realization of her Asiatic policy and thrown back upon Europe.

The next element in the diplomacy of the peace-loving king was the fanning into flame again of the "revanche" spirit of France by the arrangement of the quasi-alliance, called the *entente*, between Great Britain, France and Russia, aimed distinctly and avowedly against what was known as the triple alliance of Germany, Austria and Italy, which had for 30 years kept the peace of Europe. The third and last element of this pacific program was the seduction of Italy from the triple alliance, by rousing the irredentist hopes for winning from Austria the Trente district in south Tyrol, which Italy covets.

It is hardly necessary for me to call attention to the extreme peril involved in this so-called peaceful diplomacy to the German and Austro-Hungarian empires. I myself became first fully aware of it on June 27, 1905. On that day I had an extended interview with a distinguished British statesman in the House of Commons in London. I was on my way to Wilhelms-höhe to meet his majesty the German emperor, to arrange with his majesty the cartel of exchange of educators between universities in the two countries. When I revealed this fact to my host the conversation immediately took a turn which made me distinctly feel that a grave crisis was impending in the relations of Great Britain to Germany.

I was so firmly impressed by it, that I felt compelled to call my host's attention to the fact that the great number of American citizens of German extraction, the friendliness of the German states to the cause of the Union during our civil war, and the virtual control of American universities by men educated at German universities, would all make for close and continuing friendship between Germany and the United States. When I arrived in Germany, I asked in high quarters for the explanation of my London experience and was told that it was the moment of greatest tension in the Morocco affair, when all feared that, at British instigation, France would grasp the sword.

The larger part of the next two years I spent in Germany as exchange professor in the three universities of Berlin, Bonn and Leipsic, also as lecturer before the bar association at Vienna. Naturally I formed a really vast circle of acquaintances among the leading men of both empires, and the constant topic of conversation everywhere at all times and among all classes, was the growing peril to Germany and Austro-Hungary of the revived pan-Slavic policy and program of Russia, the rekindled "revanche" of France and Great Britain's intense commercial jealousy.

## A DINNER WITH THE KAISER.

In the month of August, 1907, I was again at Wilhelmshöhe. The imperial family were at the castle and somewhere about the 10th of the month it became known that King Edward would make the emperor a visit or rather a call, for it was nothing more cordial than that, on the 14th.

On the afternoon of the 13th, the day before the arrival of the king, I received a summons to go to the castle and remain for dinner with the emperor. When I presented myself, I found the emperor surrounded by his highest officials, Prince Buelow, the chancellor of the empire, Prince Hohenlohe, the imperial governor of Alsace-Lorraine, Prince Radolin, the German ambassador to France, Excellency von Lucanus, the chief of the emperor's civil cabinet, Gen. Count von Huelsen-Haeseler, the chief of the emperor's military cabinet, Field Marshal von Plessen, Chief Court Marshal Count Zu Eulenburg, Lord High Chamberlain Baron von dem Knesebeck and the Oberstallmeister, Baron von Reischach.

The dinner was on the open terrace of the castle looking toward the Hercules heights. At its close the empress and the ladies withdrew into the castle and the emperor with the gentlemen remained outside. His majesty rose from his seat in the middle of the table and went to one end of it, followed by Prince Buelow, Prince Hohenlohe, Prince Radolin and Excellency von Lucanus. His majesty directed me to join the group, and so soon as we were seated the chief of the civil cabinet turned to me and said that he was afraid that our good friend, President Roosevelt, unwittingly did Europe an injury in mediating between Russia and Japan, since this had turned the whole force of the pan-Slavic program of Russia back upon Europe. All present spoke of the great peril to middle Europe of this change.

Then both the German ambassador to France and the governor of Alsace-Lorraine spoke discouragingly of the great in-

crease of hostile feeling on the part of the French toward Germany, and, finally, the part that Great Britain had played and was playing in bringing about both of these movements was dwelt upon with great seriousness mingled with evidences of much uneasiness. King Edward came the next morning at about 10 o'clock and took his departure at about 3 in the afternoon. Whether any remonstrances were made to his majesty in regard to the great peril, which he, wittingly or unwittingly, was helping to bring upon middle Europe, I have never known. It seemed to me, however, that after that date he modified considerably his diplomatic activity. But he had sown the seed in well-prepared ground and the harvest was bound to come. The three great forces making for universal war in Europe, namely, the pan-Slavic program of Russia, the "revanche" of France and Great Britain's commercial jealousy of Germany, had been by his efforts brought together. It could not fail to produce the catastrophe. It was only a question of time.

## THE YOUNG TURK REVOLUTION.

The following year, the year 1908, saw the revolt of the young Turkish party in Constantinople which forced from the sultan the constitution of July, 1908. According to this constitution, all the peoples under the sovereignty of the sultan were called upon to send representatives to the Turkish Parliament. Both Bulgaria and Bosnia-Herzegovina were nominally subject to that sovereignty, according to the provisions of the Berlin congress of the powers of 1878. For 30 years Bulgaria had been practically an independent state, and during 30 years Austro-Hungary had poured millions upon millions into Bosnia-Herzegovina, building roads, railroads, hotels, hospitals and schools, establishing the reign of law and order, and changing the population from a swarm of loafers, beggars and bandits to a body of hard-working, frugal and prosperous citizens.

What now were Bulgaria and Austro-Hungary to do? Were they to sit quiet and allow the restoration of the actual sovereignty and government of Turkey in and over Bulgaria and Bosnia-Herzegovina? Could any rational human being in the world have expected or desired that? They simply, on the self-same day, namely, October 5, 1908, renounced the nominal suzerainty of the sultan, Bulgaria becoming thereby an independent state and Bosnia-Herzegovina remaining what it had actually been since 1878, only with no further nominal relation to the Turkish government. Some American newspapers have called this the robbery of Bosnia-Herzegovina by Austro-Hungary, and have made out Austro-Hungary to be an aggressor. I have not seen, however, the slightest indication that any of these have the faintest conception of what actually took place. Europe acquiesced in it without much ado. It was said that Russia expressed dissatisfaction, but that Germany pacified her.

Four more years of peace rolled by, during which, in spite of the facts that Austro-Hungary gave a local constitution with representative institutions to Bosnia-Herzegovina, and Alsace-Lorraine was admitted to representation in the federal council, as well as the Reichstag of the German empire, that is, was made substantially a state of the empire, the pan-Slavic schemes of Russia, the French spirit of revenge and the British commercial jealousy grew and developed and became welded together, until the triple entente became virtually a triple alliance directed against the two great states of middle Europe.

## THE HOUR OF ARMAGEDDON.

Russia had now recovered from the losses of the Japanese war and the internal anarchy which followed it; France had perfected her military organization; Turkey was now driven by the allied Balkan states out of the calculation as an anti-Russian power; Bulgaria, Austro-Hungary's ally, was now completely



exhausted by the war with Turkey and that with her Balkan allies, now become enemies; and Great Britain was in dire need of an opportunity to divert the mind of her people away from the internal questions which were threatening to disrupt her constitution.

The practiced ear could discern the buzz of the machinery lifting the hammer to strike the hour of Armageddon. And it struck. The foul murder of the heir of the Hapsburgers set the civilized world in horror and the Austro-Hungarian empire in mourning. In tracing the ramifications of the treacherous plot, the lines were found to run to Belgrade. And when Austro-Hungary demanded inquiry and action by a tribunal in which representatives from Austro-Hungary should sit, Serbia repelled the demand as inconsistent with her dignity. Believing that inquiry and action by Serbia alone would be no inquiry and no action, Austro-Hungary felt obliged to take the chastisement of the criminals and their abettors into its own hands.

Then Russia intervened to stay the hand of Austro-Hungary and asked the German emperor to mediate between Austro-Hungary and Serbia. The emperor undertook the task. But while in the midst of it he learned that Russia was mobilizing troops upon his own border. He immediately demanded of Russia that this should cease, but without avail or even reply. He protested again with the like result. Finally, at midnight on the 31st of July, his ambassador at St. Petersburg laid the demand before the Russian minister of foreign affairs that the Russian mobilization must cease within 12 hours, otherwise Germany would be obliged to mobilize.

At the same time the emperor directed his ambassador in Paris to inquire of the French government whether, in case of war between Germany and Russia, France would remain neutral. The time given expired without any explanation or reply from Russia and without any guarantee or assurance from France.

The federal council of the German empire, consisting of representatives from the 25 states and the imperial territory of Alsace-Lorraine, then authorized the declaration of war against Russia, which declaration applied, according to the sound principle of international jurisprudence, to all her allies refusing to give guarantee of their neutrality.

### BELGIUM'S NEUTRALITY.

As France could move faster than Russia, the Germans turned the force of their arms upon her. They undertook to reach her by way of what they supposed to be the lines of least resistance. These lay through the neutral states of Belgium and Luxemburg. They claimed that France had already violated the neutrality of both by invasion and by the flying of their war airships over them, and they marched their columns into both.

Belgium resisted. The Germans offered to guarantee the independence and integrity of Belgium and indemnify her for all loss or injury if she would not further resist the passage of German troops over her soil. She still refused and turned to Great Britain. Great Britain now intervened, and in the negotiations with Germany demanded as the price of her neutrality that Germany should not use her navy against either France or Russia and should desist from her military movements through Belgium, and when the Germans asked to be assured that Great Britain herself would respect the neutrality of Belgium throughout the entire war on the basis of the fulfilment of her requirements by Germany, the British government made no reply, but declared war on Germany.

And so we have the alignment, Germany, Austria and probably Bulgaria on one side; Russia, Servia, Montenegro, Belgium, France and England on the other, and rivers of blood have already flowed. And we stand gaping at each other, and each

is asking the others who did it. Whose is the responsibility, and what will be the outcome? Now if I have not already answered the former question I shall not try to answer it. I shall leave each one, in view of the account I have given, to settle the question with his own judgment and conscience. I will only say that, as for myself, I thank John Morley and John Burns, the man of letters and the man of labor, that they have rent the veil of diplomatic hypocrisy and have washed their hands clean from the stain of this blunder crime.

### THE OUTCOME.

Finally, as to the outcome, not much can yet be said. There is nothing so idle as prophecy, and I do not like to indulge in it. Whether the giant of middle Europe will be able to break the bonds, which in the last ten years have been wound about him and under whose smarting cut he is now writhing, or the fetters will be riveted tighter, cannot easily be foretold. But, assuming the one or the other, we may speculate with something more of probable accuracy regarding the political situation which will result.

The triumph of Germany-Austro-Hungary-Bulgaria can never be so complete as to make any changes in the present map of Europe. All that that could effect would be the momentary abandonment of the Russian pan-Slavic program, the relegation to dormancy of the French "revanche" and the stay of Great Britain's hand from the destruction of German commerce. On the other hand, the triumph of Great Britain-Russia-France cannot fail to give Russia the mastery of the continent of Europe and restore Great Britain to her sovereignty over the seas. These two great powers, who now already between them possess almost the half of the whole world, would then, indeed, control the destinies of the earth.

Well may we draw back in dismay before such a consum-



mation. The "rattle of the saber" would then be music to our ears in comparison with the crack of the Cossack's knout and the clanking of Siberian chains, while the burden of taxation which we would be obliged to suffer in order to create and maintain the vast navy and army necessary for the defense of our territory and commerce throughout the world against these gigantic powers with their oriental ally, Japan, would sap our wealth, endanger our prosperity and threaten the very existence of republican institutions.

This is no time for shallow thought or flippant speech. In a public sense it is the most serious moment of our lives. Let us not be swayed in our judgment by prejudice or minor considerations. Men and women like ourselves are suffering and dying for what they believe to be the right, and the world is in tears. Let us wait and watch patiently and hope sincerely that all this agony is a great labor-pain of history and that there shall be born through it a new era of prosperity, happiness and righteousness for all mankind.

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